

WALT DISNEY



# WALT DISNEY

## Hollywood's Dark Prince

A Biography

by

Marc Eliot

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the idealized head of this newest of extended families, and unlock the secrets of his own true identity. The temptation was irresistible, with reality and fantasy provocatively intertwined. Walt, the wounded patriarch of a stable of "boys" who had destroyed the moral fabric of his studio "family," now had the opportunity to become Hoover's "boy." By doing so, he could not only atone for his attendant shame and mollify the rage he felt for those who had rebelled and therefore betrayed him, but find comfort in the love of a most compelling "foster father."

Disney's first five animated features, *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, *Dumbo*, and *Fantasia*, were all completed between 1936 and 1941. This so-called golden period of Disney animation concluded the same year the strike against his studio began. Generally acknowledged as the crown jewels of his animated-film career, each reflects aspects of Disney's single greatest theme: the sanctity of family and the tragic consequences when that sanctity is broken.

In these five films, Disney's heroes all begin with major personality "defects," externalized by lost or missing parental figures. The search for these figures becomes, ultimately, a quest to acquire a spiritual wholeness. The drama is further externalized by a series of objects that threaten the heroic quest: Snow White's poisoned apple; Pinocchio's growing nose; Bambi's forest fire; Dumbo's awkward ears; and in *Fantasia*'s climactic sequence, the pervasive darkness of the fearful night itself before the emergence of the reassuring dawn.

Yet Disney rejected any meanings in these cartoons other than the literal ones that rode upon the surface of their plots. Psychological analysis, indeed, any form of introspection, he insisted, meant nothing to him. He had no use for psychiatry in either his work or his life, believing it part of the same Jewish-Marxist conspiracy that had worked to destroy his studio. He also scoffed at the suggestion his relationship with Hoover had its roots in any unresolved emotional conflict with Elias.

Ironically, Disney's real-life emotional blindness proved the source of his great artistic vision. It was precisely this conscious denial that limited his awareness, and therefore his control, of the subtextural power of his movies and freed him from the barriers of cautious self-qualification. Disney's purely instinctive, externalized fantasies were the key to his movies' universal appeal to children of all ages. For

youngsters, the fairy-tale plotting of mythic, exotic stories of heroism serve as safe entertainments devoid of any hint of personalization. For adults, their own desired return to the innocence of lost youth adds a thematic, if abstracted, depth to the presentations.

After the 1941 strike, when Disney became disillusioned with animated film, and through his alliance with the FBI, Walt cast himself in the role of his greatest "character" yet, a real-life hero devoted to ridding the nation of the subversive element that threatened the great American family politic. While others pursued individuals within the system, Disney eventually pursued the Hollywood system itself, which he believed had conspired to prevent him from achieving the level of success he thought his work merited. As popular as his films had been, he remained convinced the "Old Boys Club" of mostly immigrant Jews who controlled the three major branches of the system—production, distribution, and exhibition—had worked to limit him to production, where money was spent, while denying him full access to distribution and exhibition, where money was made. Disney, forced to remain outside the industry's mainstream, believed himself to be Hollywood's bastard son.

He externalized the rage this invoked in him by attempting to destroy the structure and therefore the power centers of the industry. Eventually he accomplished his goal as one of the litigants in a landmark Supreme Court case that found the studio system an illegal monopoly. That decision ended the Majors' domination of distribution and exhibition, and further crippled an industry already reeling from governmental investigations into its politics and the new competition from "free" television.

Toward the end of his life, Disney's weekly hosting of the popular television series that bore his name reinforced his public image as everybody's kindly uncle. This image was further enhanced by the monument he built to his own legend, baptized "Disneyland," an amusement park dedicated to the memory of the happy childhood he never had. Disneyland confirmed Disney's place in the iconography of innocent indigenous American childhood, right alongside apple pie, summer vacations, baseball, ice cream, and, of course, Mickey Mouse.

By the time of his death at the age of sixty-five, obituaries mourned the passing of the great American family man who had given the world the pleasure of his films, television programs, and theme parks.

the heads of the studios pushed the man they considered their best hope to the front of the pack, that good Fundamentalist family man and filmmaker, Walt Disney.

TWO OF THE ENDURINGLY POPULAR myths of the history of American film are that Hollywood gave birth to the movies and that the industry's pioneers were Jews who had immigrated from Europe. In truth, the American motion picture industry began on the East Coast as the exclusive dominion of the urban American turn-of-the-century entrepreneurial elite. Christian names such as Dickson, Casler, Marvin, Koopman, Long, Smith, Scull, Kleine, Marion, Berst, and Méliès headed such early studios as the American Mutoscope Company, Kalem, and Vitagraph. Among these companies, the most powerful was the Wizard of Menlo Park, Thomas Alva Edison, the head of the studio that bore his name.

For more than a decade Edison had been the unchallenged premier maker and distributor of mostly esoteric, nonnarrative, silent motion picture "studies." Edison was greatly disturbed by the sudden, sweeping popularity of the new century's first novelty, street-corner nickelodeons, amusement parlors that first appeared on New York's Lower East Side. He felt they cheapened the sophisticated art of film by offering "peep show" films and other lurid diversions meant to satisfy the carnal pleasure of the workingman.

In 1910, Edison formed the first motion picture alliance, which came to be known as the "Trust." Its purpose was to protect the public (and his own financial interests) from the kind of immoral trash produced by what he termed the "Jewish profiteers," who not only ran the nickelodeons but made their own movies to show in them.

The Trust was publicly dedicated to the preservation of the industry's moral integrity and privately devoted to protecting Edison's profitable monopoly. Not only were nickelodeon operators and filmmakers denied membership in the Trust, but they were prevented from buying raw film stock and projection equipment, all of which Edison held patents on and absolutely controlled.

In response, an independent group of mostly immigrant Jewish filmmakers, led by Carl Laemmle, formed their own distribution organization, or exchange, as they called it. They organized an effective, if illegal, underground to import foreign raw film stock and equipment that allowed them to keep making movies.

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By 1912, the films of Laemmle and his partners had become more popular than those of the Trust. Edison, frustrated by his inability to wipe out his competition, resorted to hiring goon squads. They smashed the nickelodeon arcades and set block-long fires in the neighborhoods that housed them. All the while Edison justified his actions in the name of preserving the nation's morals.

The mob tactics of the Trust caused the independents to put as much distance between themselves and Edison as possible. One by one they migrated west, until they reached California. There they found cheap real estate, a perfect climate, and the natural protection of a three-thousand-mile buffer zone. California gave them a second chance to make their movies. The films they made redefined the American motion picture and the industry that produced them. Unlike their early East Coast counterparts, the heads of Hollywood's studios were less interested in artistic experimentation than profit. They put on the screen what sold the most. The public was willing to pay to see films filled with sex and violence, and Hollywood was more than happy to make them.

By the early twenties, all that remained of Edison's Trust was the issue it had raised regarding the moral content of motion pictures. The federal government kept a close watch on Hollywood, the new capital of the film industry, to make sure the movies it produced remained "socially acceptable."

However, Hollywood's moguls had no idea of what was meant by "socially acceptable" films. They didn't know if their movies were moral or immoral and couldn't have cared less. To them, films were strictly vehicles of profit, not instruments of expression. The more money a film made, the better it was. As such, they ran their businesses *like businesses* and treated their writers, directors, actors, and scenery movers as clock-punching employees rather than artists. Whenever the industry came under attack for being morally corrupt, none of Hollywood's owners believed the problem had anything really to do with morality.

Which, of course, was precisely the problem. Among those who correctly perceived Hollywood as dominated by Jews, to many in government and the private sector nothing more than heathens, unable to comprehend, let alone project, the essence of Christian morality. They believed Hollywood's Jewish businessmen had corrupted an art form for the sake of making money, and by so doing had

contributed to the widening moral corruption of America. They were, in Henry Ford's words, a perfect example of America's growing problem, its turn-of-the-century influx of "the international Jew."

And the behavior of Hollywood's Christian talent pool employed by the Jewish moguls reinforced this canard. From the teens through the early twenties, a series of drug and sex scandals and sensational murders rocked the film capital, culminating in the 1921 alleged rape of party-girl starlet Virginia Rappe by comic actor Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. The sensational Arbuckle case intensified the public's demand for governmental regulation of what it perceived to be the morally corrupt film industry. In 1922, formal legislation was introduced in Congress to create a national board of film censorship.

Fearing government intervention, the heads of the major film studios formed a self-regulating organization, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA). To head it, they appointed Postmaster General Will Hays, former traffic cop, onetime national chairman of the Republican party, and, as it happened, an Elder of the Presbyterian church. The Jewish power faction in Hollywood hoped choosing a Christian to regulate the moral content of their films would improve the overall image of its industry.

Hays's appointment stalled the movement toward federal censorship but didn't end it. There were many in Congress who felt the very formation of the MPPDA was an admission of guilt. They continued to press for federal legislation.

Nor was Hays's presence universally welcomed in Hollywood. By 1924, there were those who were adamantly opposed to any sort of regulation of film. Charlie Chaplin spoke for many that year when he came out against what he termed the MPPDA's brand of "Presbyterian censorship."

Still, for the next several years, as the country prospered, the movie industry and the government coexisted in relative peace, until the financial collapse of Wall Street brought renewed pressure on the government from the most powerful interests in the private sector to regulate the moral content of motion pictures. This latest attack on the moral vacuity of American movies and the men who made them was led once more by those looking for a link between the nation's economic downturn and its moral one. And with each new attack, the nation's Jewish-American studio heads felt the chill of anti-Semitism cool Hollywood's balmy, and quite profitable, climate.

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In 1929, needing a "hot" issue to boost his newspapers' sagging circulations, William Randolph Hearst ran a series of editorials demanding the revival of federal censorship to regulate the growing immorality of motion pictures. No friend of either Jews or the film industry, he considered newsreels, shown in effect "free" along with the features, a threat to his newspapers.

Hearst's campaign received much support in Congress, where the definition of movie morality had expanded through the years to include not only sexual provocation but political subversion. In March of 1929, U.S. Senator Smith Brookhart summed up what he considered the deteriorating situation in Hollywood as nothing more than a battle for profit at the cost of sexual and social morality between competing studios, led by "bunches of Jews."

What Hollywood desperately needed was a new hero who not only extolled the right virtues but understood what they were in the first place. What Hollywood got, as if on cue, was Walt Disney's *Steamboat Willie*, the perfect nonsexual, apolitical movie starring a harmless little talking mouse who courted his sweetheart by singing her a song. Overnight, every major studio in Hollywood that had for the better part of a decade turned out the kind of lurid, violent, sexually suggestive fleshpot films guaranteed to put money in their banks, was now eager to align itself with not only the very popular, but now suddenly politically correct, filmmaker.

Walt, however, rejected all offers. After his experience with Laemmle and the loss of Oswald had left him locked out of the distribution mainstream, Disney had come to value his creative independence. "I wanted to retain my individuality," he recalled years later. "I was afraid of being hampered by [major] studio policies. I knew if someone else got in control, I would be restrained, held down to their ideas of low cartoon cost and value."

Disney now wanted a distribution deal, to which none of the Majors would agree. As much as they needed him, they would not permit an unaligned, independent filmmaker to gain a position of influence and power among their Old World brotherhood. The actions of the studio owners had come full circle. In their refusal to deal with an independent, and a Christian one at that, they had ironically echoed the exclusivity that had caused Edison to form his infamous Trust.

Walt did accept a personal invitation from his old nemesis Carl

## S E V E N

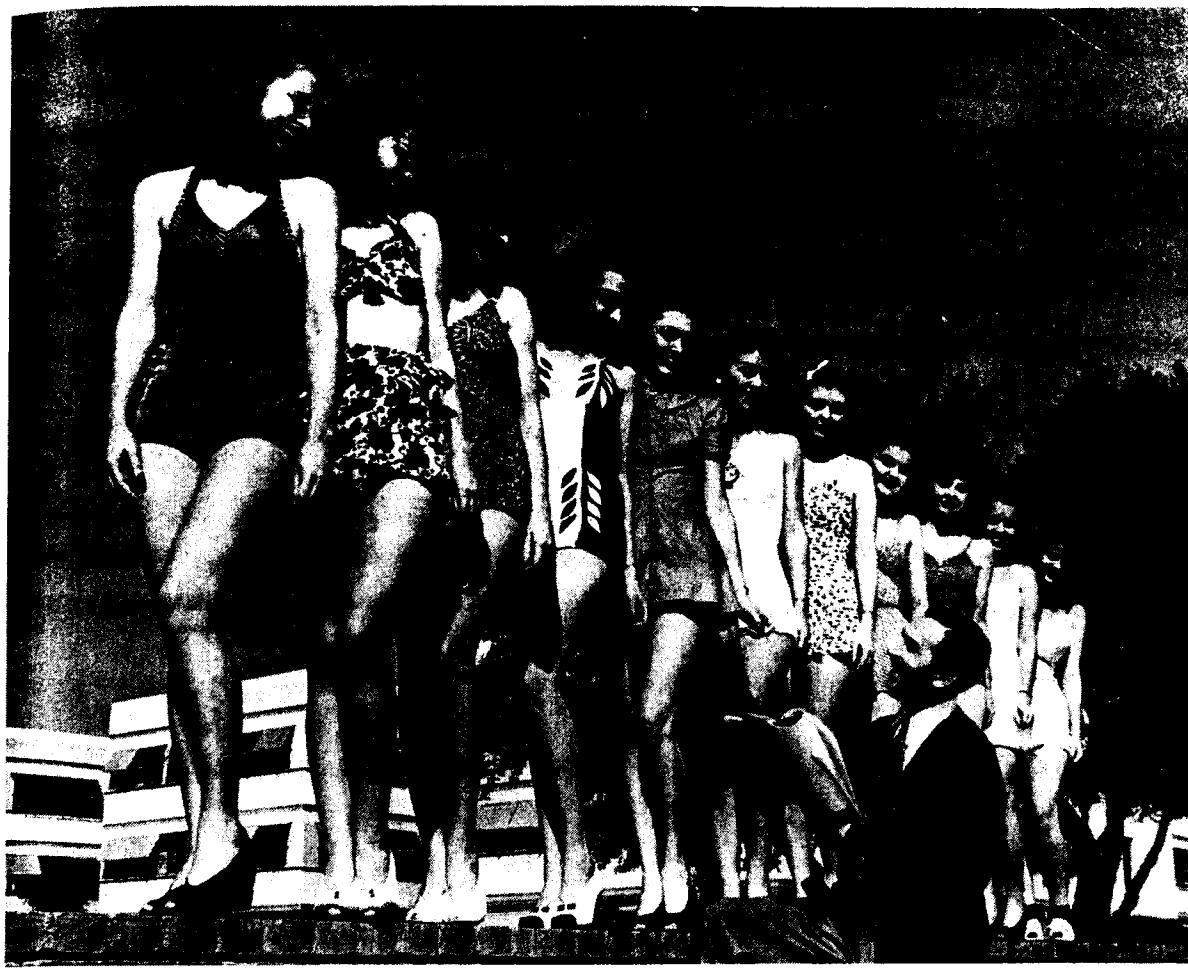
# Disney's Folly—The Making of *Snow White*

SHORTLY AFTER *The Three Little Pigs* opened, the leaders of several Jewish organizations met with Disney to express their concerns about a scene in which the Big Bad Wolf disguised himself as a Hebrew peddler to trick one of the pigs into opening his door. Although he agreed to remove the offensive scene—the peddler in robe, beard, and glasses became a nondescript door-to-door brush salesman in future releases—Walt insisted to friends he hadn't intended anything more than a spoof of Carl Laemmle's many unsuccessful attempts to blow down the Disney studio's house.

*The Three Little Pigs* remained in continuous release for the rest of the decade. Because of the Wolf's enormous popularity, Disney starred him in a series of cartoons that emphasized the humor of his ineffectiveness rather than the menace of his threat.

The following year Walt decided to film an original animated story he called *The Golden Touch*, a "Silly Symphonies" based on the old King Midas fairy tale, wherein everything the king touches turns instantly to gold until, much to his dismay, he discovers he cannot touch anything, especially other people.

Walt insisted on directing the film himself. It was his first directorial attempt and looked it. The continuity was choppy, the storytell-



Walt Disney "auditioning" the studio's female employees. By suggesting he was shifting to "live action" movies, he hoped to intimidate his animators into not striking. June Paterson is second from the left. (June Paterson)

The controversial cartoon panel with the "swastika" imbedded in the musical notes. (FBI document 61-7560-9276)



independent studio executives and filmmakers: William Cagney, Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Sol Lesser, David O. Selznick, Edward Small, Hunt Stromberg, Walter Wanger, Orson Welles, and Sam Goldwyn. The Society of Independent Motion Picture Producers (SIMPP) was created to challenge the Majors' domination of the three main phases of the business: production, distribution, and exhibition.

For the most part, the Majors were still controlled by the same group of men who had first broken the iron grip of the old Edison Trust. Ironically, a quarter of a century later, their success had led them to create an even more anticompetitive environment than the one from which they had so desperately fled. So much so that no independent film could gain national distribution unless the filmmaker or studio dealt with one of the Majors, who not only controlled all the distribution networks but owned virtually every first-run theater in the country. The only deal to be had was their deal, on their terms. In 1938, the society brought formal suit against Paramount Pictures (*United States of America v. Paramount Pictures, Inc., et al.*—MGM, Fox, Universal, Warner Bros., Columbia, United Artists, and RKO all named as codefendants).\*

Disney's membership in SIMPP signaled his formal entrance into political activism, which had long been nurtured by Gunther Lessing. One of Lessing's primary "Laws of the Jungle" was an allegiance to the politics of opportunism: the principle of personal gain over political idealism. During the time Disney helped organize the independent filmmakers against the industry's mainstream, he also was accompanying Lessing to American Nazi party meetings and rallies.

According to Arthur Babbitt, "In the immediate years before we entered the war, there was a small but fiercely loyal, I suppose legal, following of the Nazi party. You could buy a copy of *Mein Kampf* on any newsstand in Hollywood. Nobody asked me to go to any meetings, but I did, out of curiosity. They were open meetings, anybody could attend, and I wanted to see what was going on for myself."

"On more than one occasion I observed Walt Disney and Gunther Lessing there, along with a lot of other prominent Nazi-afflicted [sic] Hollywood personalities. Disney was going to meetings all the time. I

\*SIMPP's challenge took more than a decade to reach the Supreme Court. Disney's ongoing involvement with SIMPP is detailed in chapters 12 and 14.

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was invited to the homes of several prominent actors and musicians, all of whom were actively working for the American Nazi party. I told a girlfriend of mine who was an editor at the time with *Coronet* magazine who encouraged me to write down what I observed. She had some connections to the FBI and turned in my reports.\*

If Disney and Lessing were sympathetic to the American Nazi movement, their interest was most likely motivated by the desire to regain favor with the once-lucrative, Nazi-occupied countries where Disney films were now banned. To that end Walt was also committed to the "America First" movement and became one of Hollywood's most active prewar isolationists. Under Lessing's tutelage, Disney discovered how the passions and power of political activism could be used as weapons for personal gain. And later on, for revenge.

**BILL LITTLEJOHN**, a tall, pale, lanky "inbetweener" at Fleischer who chose to remain in New York when the studio relocated to Florida, became one of the chief organizers of the independent Cartoonists Guild. Elected its president in 1939, one of the first things Littlejohn did was to affiliate the guild with the much stronger and more powerful Painters Union (A.F. of L. Painters and Paperhangers Union). The newly strengthened guild succeeded in unionizing the animation departments of the Terry studios, MGM, Warner Bros., Screen Gems, and Lantz, after which the Guild set its sights on the big prize, the Disney studio.

To counteract Littlejohn, Lessing continued to urge Walt to form a company union. Finally, late in 1939, with Disney's still reluctant approval, Lessing composed the proclamation that officially established the Disney Studio Federation.

According to Bill Littlejohn, "A company union is always created to keep out legitimate unions. They're seldom organized by the employees and really fall under the heading of antiunion activity. It was ironic that one of the Disney animators involved with the organization

\*The existence of these reports has been neither confirmed nor denied by the FBI.

In her memoirs German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl claims that after *Kristallnacht* she approached every studio in Hollywood looking for work. No studio head would even screen her movies except Walt Disney. He told her that he admired her work but if it became known that he was considering hiring her, it would damage his reputation.

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"Why was Zack fired? Well, let me put it this way. He wasn't a troublemaker, he was a good artist and didn't give anybody a hard time. What he did have was the last name of Schwartz and a big nose."

According to Babbitt, "Mr. Lessing brilliantly had two company policemen present me with a letter written by him [Lessing] stating that they had warned me numerous times not to do any organizing on the company grounds, and as I had disobeyed, I was being fired. This in spite of the fact I had a three-year contract and firing me was a direct violation of the Wagner Act.

"I asked the policemen if they minded if I went to my office and got my pencils and things. They said all right. It took me a half hour to gather up about three pencils. In the meantime quite a crowd gathered at the door of the building, and I was marched off the grounds with a policeman holding me at each elbow."

Babbitt appealed his firing to the labor board. On the day he was supposed to give his deposition, two Burbank policemen paid a visit to his home and charged him with carrying a concealed weapon.

Babbitt said, "They were so concealed they still haven't found them. I did have a weapon hidden somewhere for my own protection, because I'd been threatened several times. It got so bad I had to sleep in other people's houses. I'd get a phone call telling me it'd be a good idea not to go home that particular night. So I was taken to the Burbank jail, and of course it was just a coincidence that the chief of police of Burbank was the brother-in-law of Disney's in-house chief of security. I was not allowed to make any phone calls.

"Because I didn't have the weapon actually on my person, I was fingerprinted and put into the drunk tank. I had a two o'clock appointment with the labor board, which of course, I missed. When I didn't show up at the hearing, one of the sympathetic vice-presidents at the studio, Phyllis Lambertson, somehow found out where I was and had my hearing postponed from two to seven.

"In the meantime the Burbank police department received a call around five in the afternoon that it was okay to release me. Which they did, whereupon I was brought directly to Walt Disney's studio. 'Uncle' Walt and I had a little conversation. He told me how foolishly I'd been behaving and how things could be so good for me if I just understood things from his point of view."

As a result of his labor board hearing, Babbitt was reinstated. He returned to the studio and immediately resumed his union activities.

*Strike!*

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government agreed to put up \$100,000 for Walt to make two films during the tour. In addition, Roy pointed out to Walt, the positive publicity he would receive as America's Ambassador of Goodwill would go a long way to counter new rumors of his pro-Nazi sympathies, sparked by, among other things, Disney's presence alongside Charles Lindbergh at several "America First" rallies in New York and elsewhere around the country.

Inevitably, those who most vehemently opposed the country's involvement in the war, as did Disney, were thought to be sympathetic to the Axis powers. There were those who began seeing "secret signals" in Disney's work, including, in one instance, a swastika in the final panel of a June 19, 1940, "Mickey Mouse" comic strip.

Disney had little direct input with the King Features daily "funny." However, like most everything else, it carried the sole credit "By Walt Disney" at the top of each day's final panel and the familiar curlicue signature at the bottom. The flurry of apprehension surrounding the strip eventually reached the desk of J. Edgar Hoover after one of Disney's "fans" wrote the Bureau chief citing the June 19 edition. The "fan" advised that "in the last section of *Mickey Mouse* by Walt Disney [there is] a very distinct swastika in the form of two crossed musical notes. . . . Perhaps [Disney] is not a Nazi sympathizer at all. . . . If it could mean anything, I know you are the man that should be informed of this." Hoover put the letter in Disney's file and marked the matter closed.

Walt finally agreed to make the trip to South America, and on August 17, Walt, Lillian, Bill Cottrell, Hazel, and a handpicked staff of fourteen loyalists, including Norm Ferguson, Jack Miller, Jim Midrell, Webb Smith, Ted Sears, Larry Landsburg and his wife, and Lee and Mary Blair left Los Angeles for the much-publicized journey. The entourage made several stateside fueling stops in major cities, where they were greeted by the prearranged presence of reporters, whose photos and stories of AMBASSADOR WALT DISNEY—PATRIOTIC AMERICAN WITH A MISSION helped push the story of the strike off the front pages of the nation's newspapers.

Disney's brother-in-law Bill Cottrell recalled, "Rio was the first major stop where we stayed overnight, before going on to Argentina. We stopped for refueling at a little dirt airport somewhere out of Brazil, and there were hundreds of people there, mostly children, waiting for us. How they knew we were coming we couldn't figure,

making movies. As if to emphasize his decision to make some real changes in his life, he decided it was time for the family to move. Now, however, instead of purchasing a house, he had plans drawn to have one built. He purchased a piece of property in the Holmby Hills, one of the most exclusive sections of Los Angeles, between the hills and canyons of Bel-Air and Beverly Hills, where every house, it seemed, was occupied by a show-business family.

Early in 1942, upon its completion, Disney moved his family and all their possessions into their new home. For the first time since he had been forced to do so as a child, Walt attended weekly church services, accompanied by his wife and two daughters. Often, after Sunday school classes, he spent the entire afternoon with nine-year-old Diane and six-year-old Sharon, taking them for rides on the carousel in Griffith Park or for horseback-riding lessons.

During the week he became the family chauffeur, driving the children to their respective schools: Diane to the Marlborough Middle School in the Wilshire district, Sharon to the more exclusive Westlake School for Girls in Holmby Hills. He was determined to spend as much time with his daughters as possible. And because he believed as everyone else, that the Japanese might indeed attack Los Angeles, he hired a private security team to protect his children.

While Walt made a conscious effort to treat his daughters equally, he favored Sharon, who was younger, prettier, and adopted. While Diane had angular features, dark hair, and a prominent nose, Sharon had sloe-eyes, a wide white smile, and soft blond locks. Lillian had chosen her over the other candidates for adoption precisely because of her striking good looks. The school she attended, Westlake, was filled with the children of Hollywood's most successful show-business families. It particularly appealed to Disney because, with the exception of one or two "musical Jews," as he referred to them, Westlake was restricted.

One day in 1942, the six-year-old daughter of a well-known Jewish producer was admitted after her father threatened not only to sue the school but to see to it the case received considerable publicity in the press. On his daughter's first day of classes, she was approached by six-year-old Sharon, who, after introducing herself, said proudly, "I heard all about you from my daddy. You're Jewish, right? My daddy says your father made all his money in the last twenty years!"

Neither was old enough to understand what any of that meant, and

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they quickly became friends. Sharon liked to bring her new classmate home after school for ice-cream sundaes, made at the brand-new soda fountain Walt had installed in the children's den.

In spite of his distaste for her father, Walt was cordial to the little girl, probably because Sharon liked her so much. Years later, the friend recalled that "whenever Walt was around he was like a living Santa Claus, and every so often he would run this big locomotive for us that ran the perimeter of his house. He was like this big kid, so happy his daughter and her little friend liked his toys."

Diane, meanwhile, perhaps jealous of all the attention her half-sister received, announced her intention to convert to Catholicism. Her vow, which Walt took as a disloyal rejection of the family's Fundamentalist heritage, so angered him he reportedly slapped her hard across the face, one of the very few times he ever raised his hand to his children. This Elias-like flash of anger frightened his children and angered Lillian, who warned Walt that if he ever again so much as lifted an eyebrow to either of their daughters, she would take them so far away he would never be able find them. The thought terrified Disney, and he never again raised his voice to either of his girls.

Barely five weeks after his "retirement," in January 1942, the Naval Bureau of Aeronautics offered Walt the chance to make twenty animated training films for a total budget of \$80,000. Anxious to get out of the house and back into his studio, Walt instantly accepted the offer.

Walt worked out of an unused building on the studio grounds. By cutting costs and using a skeletal crew of the only acceptable animators available,\* he managed to bring the entire series in \$8,000 under budget. The initial twenty cartoons proved so popular that Walt was inundated with orders from every government agency for dozens of additional ones, some intended only for military audiences, others as propaganda for public consumption.

The new assignments proved a mixed blessing for Disney. While

\*The majority of Disney's draft-eligible animators received exemptions by opting for duty in the special services division of the armed forces—the 18th Air Force Base Unit, otherwise known as the FMPU (First Motion Picture Unit). "Fumpoo," as it was called by its troops, was comprised of approximately 150 officers, enlisted men, and civilians, and was located on the grounds of what had been the old Hal Roach Studios in Culver City. The main assignment of the unit was to produce training films.

he insisted I call him that—Walt—rather than Mr. Disney. I told him, I see L. B. Mayer and I say Mr. Mayer. I see Darryl Zanuck and I say hello Mr. Zanuck. I never say hello L.B., or Darryl. And Disney just smiled and said, ‘Well, Stanley, I have a policy here. I let everybody call me Walt instead of giving them a \$5 raise.’ That was supposed to be funny.”

Myers believed Disney's desire to keep their association secret had do at least in part with the fact that Myers was a Jew. He said, “I knew Joe Rosenberg should have been on the Disney board of directors. After all, he'd attended every board meeting since the late thirties, sitting right alongside Walt, advising him on long-range financial planning, and more than once bailing him out of sticky situations. It was Joe who brought me to Walt in the first place. So why wasn't he a member of the studio's board? For the same reason Disney didn't want it known he was doing business with me. Because his name was Rosenberg, simple as that. Being in business with a Rosenberg and a Myers didn't sit very well with a Disney.”

Walt's deal with Myers provided enough capital to justify additional funding from the Bank of America. In July 1949, Disney was able to announce a full schedule of new films and the completion of the long-awaited *Cinderella*, the studio's first fully animated feature in seven years.

The public eagerly awaited the film's February 1950 release. Although it received mediocre reviews and was hurt by comparisons to *Snow White*—a comparison initially encouraged by Disney, who, although his personal involvement in the making of the film was limited, now insisted all its ads include the tag line: “Not since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* has there been a picture like this”—*Cinderella* was the studio's first legitimate box-office smash in nearly a dozen years. Audiences the world over cheered what they perceived as Disney's return to form.

Indeed, the film was the first from the studio since *Bambi* to approach any of the familiar Disney thematic flourishes. Once again, Walt's vision of a world based on the sanctity of family held together by unshakable moral conviction, threatened by stepparents and vicious siblings, and redeemed by a fairy godmother, was trotted out for dramatic display.

*Cinderella* cost \$3 million to make and grossed more than \$5 million domestically, prompting *Variety* to compare the studio's good

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persistent and long-standing rumors of his anti-Semitism. At a fancy ceremony the Beverly Hills chapter of the B'nai B'rith proudly cited Walt Disney as their choice for its 1955 "Man of the Year."

Because of his chronic neck pain and, more recently, frequent and persistent sore throats, in January of 1956, Disney was forced to cut back his travels and public appearances. For the first time in his life he spent weeks at Holmby Hills enjoying something other than riding his cherished "Carolwood Pacific." The reason was Walt's newest grandchild, Christopher Disney Miller, whom he utterly adored.

Lillian was not used to Walt's presence around the house. Holmby Hills was her domain. Frustrated by this invasion of her privacy, she decided to remodel the entire house. Walt's taste in decor, perhaps best described as early Roy Rogers—heavy paneling, western-style furniture, rocking chairs, giant wooden wagon wheels, miniature train models, plaid sofas, and artificial flowers—gave her headaches, especially with a lit cigarette constantly clouding up the air.

One change called for the removal of the front living-room wall, to be replaced with a picture window to better keep an eye on Christopher and make sure he didn't accidentally fall into the new Olympic-sized swimming pool Walt had installed (and almost never used), and drown.

Although money was no longer a problem, Walt insisted Lillian use a crew of technicians and builders from the studio, delighting in the idea of not having to pay them anything extra, seemingly oblivious to the fact that this was the very action of studio moguls that had, in the late 1920s, precipitated the film industry's great union movement.

That June, reflecting perhaps Hollywood's changing times, the Guild of Variety Artists, once an avowed enemy of Walt, awarded him a lifetime membership for his "increasing efforts to discover new ways to keep the greatest number of people in the field of show business gainfully employed."

In July, Disney returned to Marceline for "Walt Disney Day" and dedicated a public swimming pool on the site, as Disney recalled tearfully in his speech, "where we swam in a cow pond, after we chased the cows out." The pool was the centerpiece of a ten-acre park named in his honor, which he had helped finance.

A week later he was sued by Kirk Douglas. The Douglas lawsuit was an odd one. It was unusual for "talent" to sue a studio or

choked with emotion: "In any career it helps to have some kind of genius. I've got it—but it happens to be in the person of my brother. Roy runs the company, the whole works, at home and abroad. . . . He has a talent for self-effacement which isn't going to do him a bit of good right at this moment."

The long years of bitter feuding came to an end as Walt called Roy to the podium and hugged him in the shared spotlight. Then, as Gene Kelly and Pat Boone joined together to sing "When You Wish Upon a Star," with a final wave and smile, Walt disappeared through the ballroom's heavy drapes into the hard, cold darkness beyond the bright span of fame's fancy hot lights.

*Epilogue*

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President Bill Clinton's promise of a more stringent capital-gains tax, cashed in most of his stock options and took home a check for \$192 million.

IN A BURBANK TAVERN, the son of one of Disney's original team of filmmakers sat in a corner, nursing a scotch and soda. The news of Eisner's stock deal made him chuckle. He shook his head, took a sip, and leaned back. "The irony is, the studio has a reputation for paying the lowest salaries in the business." He wiped the corners of his mouth with two fingers. "What do you suppose old Walt would think about a Jew making so much money from his studio?" He paused, then answered his own question: "He'd either hate it, because the guy was a Jew, or love it, because it meant Eisner had to have enormous talent to produce that kind of revenue. That, of course, was pure Walt. The fearful logic always colliding with the brilliant instincts. His genius, of course, was his ability to survive that kind of internal wreck, and then make great art out of it."

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STANDARD FORM NO. 64

**Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT**

TO : Director, FBI Attn: Training and Inspection DATE: December 16, 1954  
 Division

FROM : SAC, Los Angeles (66-new)

SUBJECT: WALT DISNEY  
 SAC CONTACT  
 LOS ANGELES FIELD DIVISION

Re SAC Letter 54-54 dated 10/7/54.

~~For F.I.C.~~

Date 1-12-55  
 Approved by Bureau as SAC Contac

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POSITION OF CONTACT

Mr. WALT DISNEY is the Vice-President in charge of production and the founder of Walt Disney Productions, Inc., 2400 West Alameda Street, Burbank, California. Mr. DISNEY is extremely prominent in the motion picture industry and his company is the foremost organization in the production of cartoons.

SERVICES CONTACT CAN PERFORMSAC RECOMMENDATION

Because of Mr. DISNEY's position as the foremost producer of cartoon films in the motion picture industry and his prominence and wide acquaintanceship in film production matters, it is believed that he can be of valuable assistance to this office and therefore it is my recommendation that he be approved as an SAC contact.

1954 FBI memo recommending Walt Disney be promoted to full Special Agent in Charge (SAC) contact in Hollywood.

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